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ABSTRACT

In multigrade instruction, children of at least a 2-year grade span and diverse ability levels are grouped in a single classroom and share experiences involving intellectual, academic, and social skills. "The Multigrade Classroom" is a seven-book series that provides an overview of current research on multigrade instruction, identifies key issues teachers face in a multigrade setting, and provides a set of resource guides for multigrade teachers. Book 6 focuses on developing skills and strategies in students that allow for a high level of independence and efficiency in learning. Students can be taught specific strategies that help them make decisions and solve problems on their own, process information effectively, become more reflective about their thinking and learning processes, set their own goals for personal development, and plan ways to achieve those goals. Sections discuss conditions of the learning environment that promote self-directed learning; aspects of student self-management related to self-directed learning (time management, effort management, and motivation); six types of cognitive activities occurring during self-directed learning; benefits of self-directed learning to students and teachers; classroom techniques and conditions that encourage self-directed learning and student motivation; and teacher and student activities for fostering developing self-direction in students. (Contains 28 references and 7 resources.) (SV)

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A Resource for Small, Rural Schools

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Book 6: Self-Directed Learning

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Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

THE MULTIGRADE CLASSROOM: A RESOURCE HANDBOOK FOR SMALL, RURAL SCHOOLS

Book 6: Self-Directed Learning

November 1999

Rural Education Program

Based on the September 1989 publication
of the same title written by Bruce A. Miller

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Overview

Preface

The preface describes the process used in developing this handbook, including the multigrade teachers who shared their classroom strategies and ideas for improving the usefulness of the handbook.

Introduction

The history of multigrade classroom instruction is presented, along with the background information that describes why multigrade instruction is an important and complex issue for educators.

Book 1: Review of the Research on Multigrade Instruction

In this book, the research on multigrade instruction is reviewed in order to answer two questions: (1) What effect does multigrade instruction have on student performance? and (2) What kind of training is needed in order to teach in a multigrade classroom? Detailed information focusing on organizing and teaching in a multigrade classroom is also presented.

Book 2: Classroom Organization

This book describes strategies for arranging and organizing instructional resources and the physical environment of the classroom. Sample classroom layouts and a "design kit" for organizing your classroom are also included.

Book 3: Classroom Management and Discipline

Establishing clear expectations for student behavior and predictable classroom routines has been shown to improve student performance. In this book, research relating to classroom management and discipline are presented, along with a checklist for planning management routines and discipline procedures.

Book 4: Instructional Organization, Curriculum, and Evaluation

Research-based guidelines for planning, developing, and implementing instructional strategies are presented. This book emphasizes the development of cooperative work norms in the multigrade classroom and explains how to match instruction to the needs of students. An overview of curriculum and evaluation planning concepts is also provided. This book is a close companion piece with book 5: Instructional Delivery and Grouping.

Book 5: Instructional Delivery and Grouping

This book emphasizes that instructional quality and student grouping are key components for success in the multigrade classroom. Instructional methods such as recitation, discussion, and cooperative learning are reviewed. Planning guides and examples are also included where appropriate. Strategies for organizing group learning activities across and within grade levels, especially those that develop interdependence and cooperation among students, are discussed.

Book 6: Self-Directed Learning

Developing skills and strategies in students that allow for a high level of independence and efficiency in learning, either individually or in combination with other students, is essential in the multigrade classroom. Ideas for developing self-direction are presented in this book.

Book 7: Planning and Using Peer Tutoring

This book provides guidelines for developing skills and routines whereby students serve as "teachers" to other students within and across differing grade levels. The research on what makes for effective tutoring in the classroom is also reviewed.

Preface

The development of this handbook began in 1987, when a group of people involved in rural education raised several issues regarding multigrade classroom instruction.

In their discussions, members of the advisory committee for the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's (NWREL) Rural Education Program agreed that multigrade teacher training in their respective states was either lacking or wholly inadequate. They also were concerned about the availability of research and training materials to help rural multigrade teachers improve their skills.

As a result of these concerns, the Rural Education Program decided to develop a handbook to assist the multigrade teacher. The handbook evolved in several stages. The first was a comprehensive review, conducted by Dr. Bruce Miller, of the research on multigrade instruction that included articles, books, and research reports from the United States, Canada, Australia, and other countries.

From this review, six topic areas emerged that are considered essential for effective multigrade instruction: classroom organization; classroom management and discipline; instructional organization, curriculum, and evaluation; instructional delivery and grouping; self-directed learning; and planning and using peer tutoring. Dr. Miller developed the handbook around these six instructional areas, and a draft was completed in June 1989, with support from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI).

The second stage occurred in July 1989, when a conference was held in Ashland, Oregon, with multigrade teachers who were recommended by educational leaders from throughout the Northwest and Pacific Island regions.

During the conference, participants were organized into workgroups, each focusing on one of the topic areas. Their tasks were to review the appropriate handbook chapter for clarity and content, to suggest alternative and/or additional instructional strategies to those presented in the handbook, and to write case descriptions of activities drawn from their classrooms. For example, Joel Anderson from Onion Creek Elementary in Colville, Washington, described how he grouped students for cooperative learning. Darci Shane from Vida, Montana, presented a school handbook she had developed for parents that included a class schedule and other school-related information. (A full list of participants appears at the end of this preface.) The final handbook was completed by Dr. Miller in September 1989.

Based on the growing interest and research on multigrade instruction the handbook was revised and updated in 1999, also with support from OERI. The final version, completed with support from the Institute of International Education (IIE), is now composed of a series of seven stand-alone books.

Book 1: Review of the Research on Multigrade Instruction
Book 2: Classroom Organization
Book 3: Classroom Management and Discipline
Book 4: Instructional Organization, Curriculum, and Evaluation
Book 5: Instructional Delivery and Grouping
Book 6: Self-Directed Learning
Book 7: Planning and Using Peer Tutoring

Purpose and Scope of the Handbook

The handbook has been written to serve three general purposes:

- To provide an overview of current research on multigrade instruction
- To identify key issues teachers face when teaching in a multigrade setting
- To provide a set of resource guides to assist novice and experienced multigrade teachers in improving the quality of instruction

However, because of the complexity of multigrade instruction and the vast amount of research on effective classroom instruction, this handbook can only serve as a starting point for those educators wanting to learn new skills or refine those they already possess.

Each book of the series presents information, strategies, and resources considered important for the multigrade teacher. While all the books are related, they also can stand alone as separate documents. For example, the books on Classroom Organization (Book 2) and Classroom Management and Discipline (Book 3) contain overlapping information. Ideally, these two books are best utilized together. The same is true of the books on Instructional Organization, Curriculum, and Evaluation (Book 4) and Instructional Delivery and Grouping (Book 5). Wherever possible, these relationships have been noted in the appropriate books.

In conclusion, the series of books has been designed to be used as a research-based resource guide for the multigrade teacher. It covers the most important issues the multigrade teacher must address to be effective in meeting the needs of students. Sample schedules, classroom layouts, resource lists, and strategies aimed at improving instruction have been used throughout. It is our hope that the handbook will raise questions, provide answers, and direct the multigrade teacher to resources where answers to other questions can be found.

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Introduction

In contrast to a historical pattern of children developing within an age-varied social system, many children today spend a majority of their time in an age-segregated milieu (Katz, Evangelou, & Hartman, 1990; McClellan, 1994). The results of this pattern of segregation are thought to contribute to a declining social support system and compromised development of children's social and academic skills.

Coleman (1987) suggests the need for a significant institutional and societal response to support functions traditionally filled by the family, such as the development of feelings of belonging and community, emotional and social bonding, and nurturance. Increasingly, the school has been viewed as one of the most effective and efficient contexts to address children's academic, affective, and social needs before these needs reach crisis proportions.

A growing body of research explores the influence of educational contexts on children's development. While interest has focused on the impact of the classroom environment on children's attitudes toward school, cognitive growth, and academic development, less direct attention has been given to the relationship between classroom context (including the structure and content of children's peer relationships) and academic and social development during the elementary years. One approach explored by theoreticians and researchers for encouraging children's academic and social skill development is multigrade instruction.

In multigrade instruction, children of at least a two-year grade span and diverse ability levels are grouped in a single classroom and are encouraged to share experiences involving intellectual, academic, and social skills (Goodlad & Anderson, 1987; Katz et al., 1990; McClellan & Kinsey, 1996). Consistency over time in relationships among teachers, children, and parents is viewed as one of the most significant strengths of the multigrade approach because it encourages greater depth in children's social, academic, and intellectual development. The concept of the classroom as a "family" is encouraged, leading to expansion of the roles of nurturing and commitment on the part of both students and teacher (Feng, 1994; Hallion, 1994; Marshak, 1994).

The potential academic and social implications of the multigrade concept of education are strongly supported by extensive research demonstrating the importance of peers in children's academic and social development, and by studies of reciprocity theory, which demonstrate the positive effect on child academic and social behavior of sustained close relationships between children and caregivers (Kinsey, 1998; Maccoby, 1992).

The adequate implementation of a multigrade approach to education extends beyond simply mixing children of different grades together. A positive working model of a multigrade classroom allows for the development of academic and social skills as the teacher encourages cross-age interactions through tutoring and shared discovery. Social competence develops

for older children out of their roles as teachers and nurturers, and for younger children out of their opportunity to observe and model the behavior of their older classmates (Katz et al., 1990; Ridgway & Lawton, 1969).

The multigrade classroom has traditionally been an important and necessary organizational pattern of education in the United States, notes Miller (1993). Multigrade education dates back to the one-room schools that were the norm in this country until they were phased out in the early part of the 1900s (Cohen, 1989; Miller, 1993). From the mid-1960s through mid-1970s, a number of schools implemented open education, ungraded classrooms, and multigrade groupings. Although some schools continued to refine and develop the multigrade concept, many of these programs disappeared from public schools. With the beginning of the industrial revolution and large-scale urban growth, the ideal of mass public education took root and the practice of graded schools began in earnest.

The graded school system provided a means of organizing and classifying the increased number of urban students of the 1900s. Educators found it easier to manage students by organizing them into age divisions or grades. Other factors, such as the advent of the graded textbook, state-supported education, and the demand for trained teachers, further solidified graded school organization (Miller, 1993; Uphoff & Evans, 1993). Critics of the graded school were quick to emphasize this deficiency. The realization that children's uneven developmental patterns and differing rates of progress are ill-matched to the rigid grade-level system has resulted in a growing interest in and study of the potential benefits of multigrade education in recent years (Miller, 1996). This growing interest is due to a greater focus on the importance of the early years in efforts to restructure the educational system (Anderson, 1993; Cohen, 1989; Stone, S.J., 1995; Willis, 1991) and an awareness of the limitations of graded education.

The multigrade classroom is labor intensive and requires more planning, collaboration, and professional development than the conventional graded classroom (Cushman, 1993; Gaustad, 1992; Miller, 1996). Sufficient planning time must be available to meet the needs of both teacher and students. Insufficient planning, staff development, materials, support, and assessment procedures will have an impact on the success of the multigrade program (Fox, 1997; Miller, 1996; Nye, 1993).

Despite these constraints, there are special advantages to multigrade classrooms. Flexible schedules can be implemented and unique programs developed to meet students' individual and group interests and needs. Combined classrooms also offer ample opportunity for students to become resourceful and independent learners. The multigrade rural classroom is usually less formal than the single-grade urban or suburban classroom. Because of the small class size, friendly relationships based on understanding and respect develop naturally between the students and the teacher. In

this setting, students become well-known by their teacher and a family atmosphere often develops.

However, many teachers, administrators, and parents continue to wonder whether multigrade organization has negative effects on student performance. For most rural educators, multigrade instruction is not an experiment or a new educational trend, but a forceful reality based on economic and geographic necessity. In a society where educational environments are dominated by graded organization, the decision to combine grades is often quite difficult. The Rural Education Program of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory receives numerous requests from rural educators with two overriding concerns regarding multigrade classrooms:

- What effect does multigrade instruction have on student performance?
- What kind of preparation or training is needed to be an effective teacher in a multigrade classroom?

This handbook will provide answers to these questions and develop an overview of key issues facing school districts and teachers involved in or contemplating multigrade classrooms.

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What Is Self-Directed Learning?

The challenge for the multigrade teacher is to meet the individual needs of students in a classroom setting characterized by multiple levels of ability, achievement, and social and physical development. Although regular, single-grade classrooms also have diverse student levels, differences found in the multigrade classroom lead to increased demands on teacher time and effort. Multigrade teachers, therefore, must be well-organized, resourceful, and able to develop self-direction in students.

A touchstone of effective learning is that students are in charge of their own learning; essentially, they direct their own learning processes. In a discussion of indicators of engaged, effective learning, Jones, Valdez, Nowakowski, and Rasmussen (1995) describe characteristics of students who are responsible for their own learning. One characteristic is a student's ability to shape and manage change, in other words, to be self-directed. Covey (1989) recognizes the importance of self-directedness, which he calls proactivity, by including it as one of the habits characterizing highly effective individuals:

> *It means more than merely taking initiative. It means that as human beings, we are responsible for our own lives. Our behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions. We can subordinate feelings to values. We have the initiative and the responsibility to make things happen (p. 71).*

Educators can nurture student self-direction and personal efficacy by providing students with opportunities before, during, and after instruction to exercise some control over their own learning. This does not mean students make all the decisions, and it does not mean reverting to the curriculum of "personal relevance" of the '60s or the "child-centered curriculum" of years ago. An emphasis on student self-direction and efficacy means that students are taught and engaged in specific strategies that offer them opportunities to make decisions and solve problems on their own without being told what to do at all times. It means providing students with strategies designed to help them process information effectively and be self-confident, believing that they have the ability to succeed. And perhaps most important, we help students become more reflective about their thinking and learning processes.

Specific strategies include encouraging students to set their own goals for personal development and instructional improvement, and planning ways to achieve these goals. According to Hom and Murphy (1983):

> *A growing body of research indicates that when students are working on goals they themselves have set, they are more motivated and efficient, and they achieve more than they do when working on goals that have been set by the teacher (p. 104).*

Conditions That Promote Self-Directed Learning

What kind of environments have been found to be conducive to the development of self-directed learners? Knowles (1975) clarifies the distinction between traditional, teacher-directed learning environments and those reflecting an emphasis on self-direction. Table 1 provides an overview of Knowles' findings, indicating the underlying assumptions about the learner and their implications for the learning environment.

TABLE 1. Assumptions Regarding Teacher-Directed Versus Self-Directed Learning Environments

Assumptions About the Learner	Teacher-Directed Environment	Self-Directed Environment
View of the learner	Dependent	Independent
Role of the learner's experience	Starting point, but not essential	Rich resource, essential for learning
Learning readiness	Varies by maturity level	Develops by tasks and problems
Learner orientation	Subject- or content-centered	Task- or problem-centered
Learner motivation	External rewards or punishments	Intrinsic, curiosity-based

(Knowles, 1975, p. 60)

As Table 1 emphasizes, incorporating self-directed learning into any classroom requires more than just shifting to a different instructional approach. Self-directed learning demands a fresh look at assumptions about the learner, learning, self-motivation, and the classroom environment. Despite the apparent value of fostering self-directed learning activities in any classroom, research on the appropriate methodology for achieving it is sketchy, but growing rapidly.

Issues and Concerns

Thomas, Strage, and Curley (1988) examine five challenges related to self-directed learning:

1. Much is still to be learned about the spontaneous development of self-directed or autonomous learning behaviors. Research hasn't shown, for example, why certain children are more likely to be successful independent learners than others.
2. What is known about self-directed learning gathered primarily from laboratory observations suggests that classroom applications can be powerful, but implementation will be challenging. Developmental research on learning indicates that independent, self-directed learning activities are closely tied to physical maturity.
3. Teacher-directed learning has a well-developed repertoire of instructional strategies and techniques. Self-directed learning has no comparable collection of proven practices.
4. Teachers may have a great deal of difficulty learning how to share control of instruction with students. Teachers are taught to make the decisions in the classroom, and helping students make their own decisions will conflict with some teachers' learned experiences as well as their feelings about being in charge. The reorientation toward a student-owned classroom requires not only a cognitive reorientation but an affective one, as well. For some teachers this is a most difficult challenge.
5. Similarly, students who are used to relying on teachers to give them structure, direction, and information will have to learn to start asking themselves, "What can I do before I ask an adult?"

Self-directed learning activities are of primary concern to those multigrade instructors who have prized self-directed learners and have recognized the importance of encouraging their development. It could be argued that one of the highest concerns of education in general is the creation and nurturing of self-directed learners. An adult who has not incorporated the skills of independent, self-directed learning will go through life with a tremendous handicap.

Although research on self-directed learning is still in the formative stage, guidelines for the development of classroom activities that allow and encourage autonomous learning are emerging. Since many students do grow into independent learners, it is obvious that some current classroom practices do encourage independent learning. An excellent starting point for developing self-directed learning is to observe student behaviors.

Self-Directed Learning Behaviors

Self-directed learning behaviors can be classified into two broad categories: cognitive and behavioral. Behavioral activities, or self-management activities, include motivation and volition (will or determination), time management, and maintaining effort. Cognitive activities include mental processes that select, elaborate, organize, monitor, or otherwise process information.

Table 2 presents self-directed learning categories related to student self-management.

TABLE 2. Classes of Self-Directed Learning: Self-Directed Management Activities

Category	Example Activities
Time Management	Recognizing time requirements Keeping track of elapsed time Scheduling sufficient time Distributing time according to tasks
Effort Management	Establishing a productive study environment Setting learning and achievement goals Initiating effort Finding materials Maintaining attention
Motivation or Volition	Monitoring attention Assessing strength and weaknesses of study habits Tracking time- and effort-management activities

(adapted from Jones, et al., 1995)

In the multigrade classroom, self-management activities tend to be of first concern to the teacher. Students who can manage their time, follow schedules, find needed resources, and stay on task until assignments are completed facilitate the teacher's ability to manage the diverse levels found in the classroom. Successful multigrade teachers create environments that encourage these skills.

Phil Gillies, a fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade teacher from southern Idaho, points out that once students develop the work habits necessary for his classroom, they quickly teach them to younger students. "It was interesting that during the third year as a multigrade teacher, I noticed that those students I had for two years would say to the new fifth-graders, 'This is what you have to do, this is the way we handle the class.'" A process of socialization occurred in Gillies' classroom where younger students learned from older ones what the teacher expected in terms of classroom routines.

Table 3 presents cognitive categories associated with self-direction, along with example activities for each category. Unfortunately, these skills are seldom explicitly taught. This is due to a lack of knowledge on the part of practitioners about how best to teach them and to the failure of instructional materials to provide direction and activities (Jones, et al., 1995).

TABLE 3. Classes of Self-Directed Learning: Cognitive Activities

Category	Example Activities
Selection	Finding essential information and rejecting nonessential information Taking notes Highlighting main ideas
Comprehension	Previewing material Using context clues Consulting resources and references
Memory Enhancers	Reviewing material Mnemonic tests Self-tests Devising appropriate study strategies
Elaboration	Self-questioning Imagery Metaphors and analogies
Integration	Paraphrasing material Relational aids (charts, timelines) Using multiple but related sources Tapping prior knowledge Answers that extend beyond requirements
Monitoring	Recognizing what hasn't been mastered Awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses

(adapted from Jones, Valdez, Nowakowski, & Rasmussen, 1995)

Student Benefits

Creating and maintaining a classroom atmosphere conducive to self-directed learning benefits both students and teachers. A self-directed student or, in simpler terms, a "good" student, enjoys significant advantages over students who are deficient in self-direction. Classrooms with self-directed students provide superb role models for weaker or younger students to emulate. This is why multigrade teachers tend to devote the greatest amount of time to younger students who have not developed self-directed skills. Therefore, by enhancing students' self-direction, multigrade teachers can devote a larger percentage of time to students with the greatest need. In other words, self-directed learners allow the teacher to work intensively with small groups or individuals who need additional support.

As the multigrade teacher emphasizes self-directed learning, a more efficient learning environment is created. One of the benefits of increased self-directed behavior is the accompanying increase in the amount of academic learning time. Academic learning time (ALT) is directly related to student achievement; that is, more academic learning time leads to higher student achievement.

Encouraging students to have greater control over their learning improves their feelings of personal effectiveness and increases their motivation to learn. This bolstered sense of self-control should improve the likelihood of success in subsequent educational experiences. As the academic demands placed on students grow, so does the need for an assumption of personal responsibility for learning.

Implications for Classrooms

Given that self-directed learning skills and behaviors are of considerable benefit to both students and teachers, what can teachers do to aid their development? Can assignments and activities be structured so that students gradually acquire the skills necessary to work independently? What instructional approaches best augment self-directed skill acquisition?

Before proceeding with general guidelines and suggestions for increasing the likelihood of self-directed student behaviors, the issue of student maturity and development must be briefly explored. Teacher expectations for student competence can be set too high or too low, with equally negative effects. Students who are overwhelmed by the complexity of an academic task will protect themselves by opting out of it in the initial stages. Students who are insufficiently challenged, or who face repetitive tasks with little relevance to their skill levels, may become bored, disengage themselves from the activity, or perform half-heartedly. Careful consideration must be given, then, to the age, maturity, and competence of the student(s) before designing or initiating self-directed learning activities. Thomas et al. (1988) identify four general components of instructional activities that enhance self-directed learning:

1. Appropriate academic demands
2. Adequate instructional supports
3. Opportunities to learn and practice effective self-directed learning activities
4. Appropriate classroom goal structure

Academic demands should be structured so they are challenging but not frustrating. Expectations should be explicit and specific. That is, they should build on skills already mastered, yet force or encourage the learner to attempt new, more advanced skills. An academic task that places limited or no demands on a student will not reinforce self-directed learning strategies.

Instructional supports are activities or materials that provide feedback and progress checks or otherwise guide the student toward an academic goal. These supports should not replace the self-directed learning activities of the student, but rather should be a framework for the student's own efforts. For example, presenting the student with a list of main ideas from a chapter is not supportive, but presenting the student with the characteristics of a main idea is. Students will, in the latter case, discover the main ideas on their own and strengthen their cognitive abilities.

The more opportunities provided to students for practicing self-directed learning, the more likely they are to acquire self-directed learning skills. It is best, therefore, that the classroom climate emphasize self-directed learning. This means that students will come to expect that they will monitor their own progress, be aware of their own skill levels, and be able to identify and gather the resources required to complete progressively more challenging academic tasks.

Of special interest to multigrade classroom teachers is the emphasis that self-directed learning places on eliminating the competitive climate from a classroom and replacing it with a cooperative atmosphere. Self-directed students must operate in an environment where learning is viewed as a benefit and a necessity for all, instead of a reward for the talented.

Table 4 displays general conditions for optimizing self-directed learning activities:

TABLE 4. Conditions That Encourage Self-Directed Learning and Student Motivation

- Rewards that are contingent on specific outcomes
- Goals and a reward system that are public knowledge
- Feedback that is frequent, immediate, and contingent on performance
- An individualistic, noncompetitive environment
- Evaluation based on specific, objective criteria
- Evaluation that is private, not public
- Rewards dispensed for effort, not just ability
- Autonomy, including the opportunity for self-scheduling and reinforcement
- Attribution of success to effort, not natural ability

Multigrade classrooms should be at the forefront of future developments in self-directed learning activities, methods, and assessments. Multigrade classrooms, in fact, will be a source for many of the promising practices identified in this area. It is important to note that all of the four components of self-directed learning activities—appropriate demands, instructional supports, adequate opportunity, and appropriate goal structures—must be in place before self-directed learning will prosper. Demands without support, or excess support without concomitant demands, will not succeed.

Activities for Developing Self-Direction

What are some specific activities that multigrade teachers can do to foster self-direction? Thuy-Kim (n.d.) describes a series of activities to help students make the transition from teacher-directed learning to self-directed learning. Although many of these activities were designed for high school students, they can be easily applied to other levels of schooling. Table 5 presents activities designed for the teacher, and Table 6 presents those designed for students. In both tables, the activities in the left column are those that should occur first. As one moves to the right column, the requirements for student self-direction increase. This means, for example, that the last activity in Table 6 assumes that the student has a high level of self-direction.

TABLE 5. Teacher Learning Activities for Fostering Self-Direction in Students

Help students visualize the experience of self-direction. Model self-direction.	Establish one-to-one conferences to discuss the individual's learning behavior and progress.
Teach students to value self-directed learning by communicating how valuable it is to the teacher.	Clarify the teacher and student roles in a self-directed learning environment.
Help each student create a self-fulfilling prophecy of success as a self-directed learner. During interviews, conversations, planning sessions, and progress reviews, reinforce growth in self-direction.	Provide students with opportunities to be self-directed and provide support when they need it. However, do not "rescue" them.
Organize a process such as contracting to structure time and effort. Set expectations and limits. Help students explore alternative activities.	Model respect for self-directed learning and encourage respect among the students.
Teach the new skills students require, such as goal setting, time management, and locating information.	Secure written commitment in a detailed learning contract and public commitment in peer groups.
Make opportunities for students to demonstrate their accomplishments. Reward them for their efforts.	Establish work groups where students learn to complete tasks and projects cooperatively and with minimal teacher supervision.
	Model honesty and risk-taking. Reaffirm the value of challenge, struggle, and personal growth.

(adapted from Thuy-Kim, [n.d.])

TABLE 6. Student Learning Activities for Fostering Self-Direction in Students

Students compile a list of self-directed learners and then list their personal characteristics: ways of learning and skills common among them. Produce a profile of the successful self-directed learner.	Students practice self-directed skills on new, challenging tasks.
Students set goals for how they would like to become more self-directed. List behaviors that would show progress.	Peer groups discuss behavioral changes achieved and successes accomplished by each individual.
Students assess their progress toward meeting their goal.	Students write contracts and practice skills. They also explore alternative learning activities.
Use heterogeneous, small-group projects to allow for modeling leadership in self-directed activities by successful students.	Students gain reinforcement by tutoring peers and presenting completed projects as evidence of success.
Students rate themselves on scales of time management, organization, accomplishment, and resource identification.	Students engage in projects where indepth mastery in one area is required.

(adapted from Thuy-Kim [n.d.])

Conclusion

Self-directive behaviors are vitally important in the multigrade classroom. Students who can work independently, set goals, manage their time, and locate needed resources free the teacher to help students with the most need. However, developing self-direction is difficult and requires a learning environment different than the traditional, teacher-directed classroom. Self-direction is best fostered in a classroom where the teacher structures activities that develop such characteristics as independence, self-management, and cooperation. Such environments are also characterized by teacher expectations that reward risk-taking, personal goal-setting, and task completion. Even though the development of conditions that nurture self-directed learning may require extra effort and the rethinking of many assumptions about the learner, the benefits for both the teacher and the student are significant.

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Blakey, E., & Spence, S. (1990). *Developing metacognition* [ERIC digest]. Syracuse, NY: ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 327 218)

Available from: Eric Clearinghouse on Information Resources
5207 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

Costa, A.L. (1991). *Developing minds.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

This staff development program is designed to increase students' true thinking time by helping teachers improve their classroom questioning techniques. Asking more effective classroom questions can encourage all students to think at higher cognitive levels and ask questions of their own that will ultimately lead to improved learning.

Available from: Appalachia Educational Laboratory
PO Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325

Della-Dora, D., & Blanchard, L. (Eds.). (1979). *Moving toward self-directed learning: Highlights of relevant research and of promising practices.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

This book reviews the research on self-directed learning, provides practical strategies, and presents background information useful to anyone working to develop self-directed learning in students.

Available from: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
225 North Washington Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

McKisson, M. (1983). *Chrysalis: Nurturing creative and independent thought in children.* Tucson, AZ: Zephyr Press Learning Materials.

Chrysalis consists of eight units designed to develop thinking, creativity, appreciation of self and others, self-reliance, and abilities in independent learning and research skills.

Available from: Zephyr Press Learning Materials
430 South Essex Lane
Tucson, AZ 85711

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. (1995). *Critical issue: Working toward student self-direction and personal efficacy as educational goals.* Oak Brook, IL: Author. Retrieved September 26, 2000, from the World Wide Web: www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lr200.htm

This article describes characteristics of students who are responsible for their own learning. One characteristic is a student's ability to shape and manage change, in other words, self-directed. Great emphasis is placed on recognizing the importance of self-directedness, which is often referred to as proactivity. The book encourages teachers to provide opportunities for students to take initiative. Students should be/are responsible for their own learning and lives.

Available from: Efficacy Institute
128 Spring Street
Lexington, MA 02173

Piskurich, G.M. (1993). *Self-directed learning: A practical guide to design, development, and implementation.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

You will learn how to develop self-directed learning packages that are applicable in many situations, from basic industrial and technical skills training to academic classroom training. This detailed but easy-to-use guide shows you how to match training needs with organizational needs, determine tasks that must be learned to meet those needs, and develop objectives and design materials that are in line with those needs.

Available from: Jossey-Bass
350 Sansome Street
San Francisco, CA 94104

Pressley, M., Wood, E., Woloshyn, V., Martin, V., King, A., & Menke, D. (1992). Encouraging mindful use of prior knowledge: Attempting to construct explanatory answers facilitates learning. *Educational Psychologist, 27*(1), 91–109.

This article explores strategies for encouraging self-directed learning. Students learn more effectively when they already know something about a content area and when concepts in that area mean something to them and to their particular background or culture. When teachers link new information to the student's prior knowledge, they activate the student's interest and curiosity, and infuse instruction with a sense of purpose.

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